

Across America, the Campaign to Increase the Minimum Wage

Don't Settle For Less: \$15 Now!

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Momentum is still growing for a \$15 minimum wage. On August 4 150 cities rallied for \$15 and union rights, with striking fast food workers engaging in civil disobedience. Meanwhile, San Francisco voters are expected to pass a \$15 referendum in November, and Seattle starts to phase in \$15 on January 1. The city of Sea-Tac, Washington has lived under \$15 all year, [proving false](#) the predictions of the 1% that economic collapse would ensue.

The savvy establishment politicians understand the populist wave of \$15, and are taking action to stem the tide. For example, the mayors of Chicago, New York and Los Angeles have endorsed various versions of a \$13 minimum wage, though Chicago's mayor [endorsing a \\$13 minimum wage](#) for only city workers in 2018 isn't likely to quiet the streets.

While elite politicians understandably fear the growing muscle of \$15, many on the political left have underestimated its strength, dismissing the movement as a fluff campaign led by opportunistic unions. This narrative includes some valid criticisms but misses the big picture entirely.

The hidden power behind the \$15 demand is the unpredictable dynamic it creates. When non-activist working people are suddenly activated on a national scale, the seeds of a social movement begin to sprout.

In the same way that people are demanding dignity and justice in Ferguson, the \$15 minimum galvanizes previously inactive segments of the population. If masses of working people become politically active the social-economic equilibrium of the country favoring the 1% begins to shake. An emerging threat to the balance of power is ultimately what's terrifying the politicians.

The "fight for \$15" is the first time in decades that working class people have been inspired by a bold demand. Two years ago \$15 was a ridiculous pipe dream. But now \$15 is starting to materialize, proving to millions of onlookers that it's achievable. Hopelessness can turn into hope and powerlessness into power when \$15 is fought for and won. Winning a once-impossible demand inspires confidence to make new equally impossible demands.

If the Occupy movement had been armed with the \$15 demand, its reach would have widened to broader layers of the community, helping expand the movement's life. The \$15 movement is one of Occupy's many children, but Occupy failed to raise any demands or solutions.

The most direct route to attack income inequality and poverty is a \$15 minimum wage, which would directly benefit 51 million people and indirectly help 30 million more, according to the [Economic Policy Institute](#).

The era of corporate-dominated national politics adds an extra layer of power to \$15: we are midway through a period of uncontrollable neoliberalism, where a demand for \$15 directly confronts the ceaseless attacks on working people's living standards.

Of course the millions of people who make less than \$15 an hour don't need this explained to them. The demand is automatically accepted, in the same way it is automatically rejected by the elite, who stand to lose \$billions in profits to rising workers' wages.

Another vital component of the \$15 demand is the role of organized labor, whose ranks include millions more working people. Unions birthed the \$15 demand in 2012 with SEIU-organized fast food strikes. This then led to unions successfully winning \$15 in SeaTac, Washington, and then Seattle.

Labor's connection to \$15 has shown non-union people why unions matter. After decades of political irrelevance because of their willingness to accept concessions without a fight, unions are beginning to wake up; and only unions could have launched the [\\$15 movement so successfully](#), since they remain the only working class organization with enough resources to successfully engage battle with the 1%.

The normally timid voice of unions is due to their links to the Democratic Party, which consistently insists that unions water down their demands to appease the 1%, thus inspiring nobody. Union politics have bored union members and the community for years. The \$15 demand is thus a break from boring union politics and a break with the Democrats in action over a serious issue, which all activists — union and non-union — should encourage.

The ultimate reason why \$15 inspires working people is that it connects with their desire for a dignified life. This sentiment lies at the core of all revolutions. The Arab Spring consisted of average people raising the voices after decades of political invisibility, in a region of mass unemployment, growing inequality in wealth and unresponsive political elites. In the U.S. the defeat of segregation was directly challenged by the simple yet profound slogan "I Am a Man," which reflected the broad-based demand for dignity among African Americans.

The tens of millions of working poor and unemployed in the U.S. are beginning to demand dignity, with potentially profound implications. A \$15 minimum wage will not solve all of our society's social problems, but it can trigger a powerful process for social change that has been absent in the U.S. for decades.

A national \$15 minimum wage can be won if average people are inspired to join labor and community groups in the streets in ongoing actions. It takes a living wage like \$15 to inspire action in the streets, while the Democratic Party's demand of \$10.10 — or slightly higher — does not. Keeping momentum towards \$15 is vital; and therefore \$10.10 is not a step in the right direction but a barrier to \$15, since it blocks energy at a crucial moment.

The national demand is \$15 because it is a living wage, although just barely. The movement doesn't have to settle for less than \$15.

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